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SUBJECT: POLL ON MEDIA USAGE IN KINSHASA SHOWS PUBLIC SOMEWHAT
AVERSE TO PARTISAN POLITICS

REF: KINSHASA 1066

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Sensitive but Unclassified. Not for Internet Distribution.

¶11. (U) Summary: According to a recent poll, television ranks first in terms of overall audience in Kinshasa, radio second and newspapers third. Newscasts are the programs most watched and listened to overall in broadcast media. Politically-affiliated media, particularly pro-Kabila outlets, lost audience in Kinshasa in the three months preceding the July poll. VOA's main carrier, Raga FM, was one of the very few radio stations to register an audience increase. Kinshasa's media are prolific, and freer than international ratings would suggest. End summary.

¶12. (U) The Kinshasa media scene is large and diverse. It comprises 44 TV stations, including five international channels; 28 radios, four of which are foreign-based; and over 20 newspapers that appear regularly.

Television: Most Popular Medium for News in Kinshasa

¶13. (U) According to EXPERTS, a private Kinshasa-based polling group, 98 percent of Kinshasa's 6 million-plus residents turn to television first for news and entertainment. (Radio attracts the largest audiences outside Kinshasa.) Mirador, Antenne A, Raga TV, state-owned RTNC1, RTGA, and CCTV are the most watched TV channels in Kinshasa, in that order. EXPERTS used a sample of one thousand people.

¶14. (U) Mirador, a new station, surged to the top of the charts by virtue of heavy doses of Nigerian soap operas. Mirador TV is owned by Michel Ladiluya, a former member of the transitional parliament and owner of the CoHydro oil company. The newspaper he owns, "Le Palmares" (independent), is also the best selling daily in Kinshasa. According to EXPERTS, television is most watched by housewives and students, audiences who tend to favor Mirador's programming.

¶15. (U) Given Mirador's domination, all the other top-rated television stations suffered declines, the largest decline (by 19 percent) being registered by pro-Kabila RTGA, owned by the "Avenir" group's Pius Muabilu, newly elected to the National Assembly. Jean-Pierre Bemba-owned CCTV registered only a four percent drop in viewer-ship. Pro-Kabila Digital Congo television, ranked eighth, registered a two percent decline. It is owned by President Kabila's sister.

¶16. (U) In its poll, taken just prior to the first round of the

presidential election July 30, EXPERTS gave the following percentages for television stations attracting the largest audiences for election-related information:
Bemba-owned CCTV (19 percent),
State-owned RTNC1 (18 percent),
and Kabila family-owned Digital Congo (9 percent).

EXPERTS notes, however, that the heavy emphasis on election-related programming caused the overall decline in audiences for these stations (to the benefit of Mirador's lighter fare).

Radio: "Good Morning, Kinshasa!"

¶17. (U) Radio is the dominant medium in the morning. Seventy percent of those polled listen to international radios such as Radio France Internationale (RFI) and UN-run Radio Okapi, each with 28 percent. Mirador FM showed a 19 percent increase, attributed to its popular music shows. Kabila family-owned RTGA FM slipped from top place to fourth, a decline of seven percent, despite a strong entertainment format, which EXPERTS attributed to a failure to innovate. Bemba-owned RALIK radio (Radio Liberte Kinshasa) ranked 17th with five percent. (Since the July poll, RALIK has been plagued with cut-offs, either ordered by the High Media Authority, or technical in nature.)

¶18. (U) Raga FM, which each weekday morning airs VOA news on Central Africa, ranked sixth among radio stations, with a two percent increase in audience.

¶19. (U) As for other international radio stations, Africa No.1 ranked seventh (12 percent rating) and BBC 21st (with three percent). There was no EXPERTS rating for francophone Belgian RTBF, which entered the Kinshasa market in late June (reftel). Regarding radio audiences, opinion leaders and professionals rank first and second.

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Newspapers: The Self-Selecting Few

¶10. (U) As with radio, "opinion leaders" and "professionals" are the two top-ranking categories among newspaper readers. Fewer than 30 percent of Congolese surveyed get any news from print media, and only six percent do so on a regular basis. (Newspapers generally cost nearly one dollar, which is prohibitively expensive for the vast majority.) "Le Palmares," "Le Potentiel" and "Le Phare" top the list of the most read papers in Kinshasa. The pro-Kabila daily "L'Avenir," ranked sixth, registered the steepest decline in readership - a significant 14.1 percent - which EXPERTS attributed to the paper's lack of objectivity.

A Word about Press Freedom

¶11. (SBU) At a recent meeting of representatives of media donor countries, we discussed the latest rating of press freedom by Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF), which put the DRC in 142nd place. The general sentiment was that such ratings are misleading. It is precisely the density, daring and predominance of the media in the DRC which causes it to rankle and sometimes provoke repressive reactions. One of the donor group's members with regional responsibilities contrasted the DRC with the ROC, which ranks relatively high in press freedom, according to RSF. He attributed the relative lack of repression among media across the river in ROC to the fact that most of it is state controlled.

Comment

¶12. (SBU) Economic constraints, which translate into very low wages for journalists and opinion-for-sale journalism, constitute the largest threat to the linked tandem of professionalism-press freedom in the DRC. The special circumstances associated with recent elections - and the fear of hate-mongering in the media - could arguably be seen as putting an additional brake on press freedom, in

the form of High Media Authority sanctions. Most would agree, however, that lack of professionalism on the part of some media outlets, notably those which are politically affiliated to the extreme, comes at a cost.

¶13. (SBU) As noted above, partisan political media generally suffered shrinking audiences during the polling period. This was particularly evident among pro-Kabila outlets, confirming and reinforcing a certain lack of popularity in Kinshasa, which could well be Joseph Kabila's greatest challenge as an elected president.
End comment

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